

**Statement of
Representative Henry A. Waxman
March 28, 2001**

Mr. Chairman, fifteen years ago, as Chairman of the Health and the Environment Subcommittee, I was one of the leaders in writing the 1986 Safe Drinking Water Act. And five years ago, as the Ranking Democrat on that Subcommittee, I was one of the leaders in writing the 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act. So I have some experience with drinking water issues.

That's why I was particularly disappointed with the Bush Administration's first drinking water action: it's decision to revoke the arsenic standard. That decision has left most Americans scratching their heads trying to figure out why the Bush Administration wants more arsenic in drinking water. Meanwhile, mining and chemical lobbyists are celebrating.

Now this weekend in Hollywood, as everyone knows, the Academy Awards were held. That got me to thinking that we should have some award here in Washington to recognize truly remarkable performances in lobbying that result in mind-boggling government decisions. So I've modestly decided to initiate a new award, called the "Golden Jackpot." The award is a golden jackpot filled with chocolate gold and silver coins.

From time to time I'll be giving this award to recognize a particularly indefensible and outrageous windfall given to a special interest group.

Today, we have three outstanding nominees, starting with President Bush's decision to break his campaign promise to curb carbon dioxide emissions. The President's decision was made possible by an all-out pressure campaign by oil and coal companies. Not only was this the first campaign promise the President broke, but for good measure it jeopardizes the international effort to combat global warming. It has everything a jackpot nominee needs to win.

The second nominee is Congress' decision to repeal the ergonomics rule, the most important workplace safety regulation in the last decade. The Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers pulled out all the stops on this one. It is a memorable example of special interests beating the real interests of thousands of workers, such as store clerks, meatpackers, and nursing home aides.

And the third nominee is President Bush's and Governor Whitman's decision to revoke the arsenic standard. Here, the mining and chemical industries gave an unforgettable performance, and repeal means that dangerous levels of arsenic will remain in the drinking water of millions of American families.

As they say during the Academy Awards, there is no loser among this group. All of the special interests involved -- the oil industry, the manufacturers, the mining companies -- received extraordinary windfalls from official action by the Administration or Congress.

Now, Price/Waterhouse have not audited the results, but I do have an envelope with the winner. And... the Golden Jackpot goes to EPA's decision to revoke the arsenic standard. It was a difficult decision, but it's tough to beat telling the American people that they need more arsenic in their drinking water.

Governor Whitman, after the hearing you'll have the opportunity to accept the Golden Jackpot on behalf of the Bush Administration. You might disagree with the judges' decision, but I hope you at least enjoy the chocolate that goes with the prize.

You know, back in 1996, the science was clear that we needed a tighter standard for arsenic, and efforts to revise the safety level had already been debated for years. But the industry argued that reducing arsenic would be too expensive and that more study was needed. So we reached a compromise. We required EPA to issue a new regulation -- after even more study -- by January 1, 2001.

After the law was passed, EPA commissioned a comprehensive study by the National Academy of Sciences, which found that EPA should lower the standard "as promptly as possible." And in January 2001, former EPA Administrator Carol Browner finally issued the new standard -- just as this Committee had directed and the science dictated.

It makes absolutely no sense to undo the new arsenic standard, and I will soon be introducing legislation to make sure every American is protected from this unnecessary risk.